

MILLER, H.



Seaman Harold Miller, Number 1578x, having no known last resting-place, is commemorated on a bronze beneath the Caribou at the Newfoundland Memorial Park at Beaumont-Hamel.

Having relinquished his occupation as a fisherman, Harold Miller answered the call of the naval authorities for volunteers and travelled the short distance from Portugal Cove to St. John's, capital city of the Dominion of Newfoundland, where, on January 21 of 1915, he reported...to duty...at the Naval Reserve training ship, HMS Calypso, moored in the harbour (see below).

On that January 21 he enlisted for the first time into the Reserve (see further below), was signed on to serve for a single year's* war-time service and underwent a satisfactory medical assessment on the morrow. He also likely attested at this time, pledging his allegiance to the King-Emperor, George V.

(Right: George V, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, Emperor of India: as a boy and young man he had served in the Royal Navy from 1877 until 1891 and always retained a fondness for the Senior Service. – The photograph of the King attired in the uniform of an Admiral of the Fleet is from the Royal Collection Trust web-site and taken in or about 1935.)



(Right: At the outset of their career, the ‘Calypso-Class’ ships were apparently considered to be superior vessels. Hybrids - powered by both steam and sail - they were able to police the outer reaches of the British Empire most efficiently and economically. The rapid progress in engine technology, however, was to mean that HMS ‘Calypso’ and her sister-ships would soon be out-classed by newer vessels. – This Royal Navy photograph, taken before 1902 when the drill-hall was reportedly built on her upper deck and the funnel removed, is from Wikipedia)



***In the early days of the War, perhaps because it was felt by the authorities that it would be a conflict of short duration, the recruits enlisted for only a single year. As the War progressed, however, this was obviously going to cause problems and the men were encouraged to re-enlist. Later recruits – as of or about May of 1916 - signed on for the ‘Duration’ at the time of their original enlistment.**



(Right above: The White Ensign has been flown by the Royal Navy in its present form since about the year 1800 although other naval ensigns had existed for at least two centuries. It consists of a red St. George’s Cross – the national flag of England - on a white field with the Union Flag* in the upper canton.)

***The Union Flag is commonly referred to as the ‘Union Jack’; this is, in fact, a misnomer since a flag is referred to as a ‘Jack’ only when flown from the bow of a ship.**

Note: During the years preceding the Great War the only military force on the Island of Newfoundland – apart from a handful of ill-fated local attempts – was to be the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland). Even so, it was to be some thirty years after the withdrawal of British troops from the Dominion in 1870 before the Reserve came into being in 1902.

Just fewer than four-hundred men were sought to enroll as seamen – apparently automatically at the rank of Able Seaman - and to present themselves annually in St. John’s for five years in order to train for a period of twenty-eight days per annum. Allowed to report at a time of their own choosing, it is perhaps not surprising that these volunteers – mostly fishermen – were to opt to train during the winter months when fishing work was minimal.



(Right above: Recruits of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) seen here in front of HMS ‘Calypso’. The shed-like superstructure seen behind them had been built onto the ship in 1902 to serve as a drill-hall. Whether the vessel was still ‘Calypso’, or had become ‘Briton’ by this time (see further below) is not clear. – photograph from Newfoundland Provincial Archives via Wikipedia)

Expenses were apparently defrayed for the most part by the British (Imperial) Government and an attempt was made to ensure the number of recruits would be kept constantly at a maximum. This practice and policy was then to be continued up until the onset of hostilities some twelve years later.

Of course, the purpose of having a reserve force at any time is to provide a trained force ready at any time to serve at a time of need or crisis. Thus in August of 1914, upon the Declaration of War by the government in London, hundreds of those men of the Royal Naval Reserve (Newfoundland) were to make their way to St. John's, from there to take passage overseas to bolster the ranks of the Royal Navy.



(Right above: Naval reservists from Newfoundland, during the early days of the Great War, before their departure for the United Kingdom - from *The War Illustrated*)

An elderly vessel, H.M.S. 'Calypso', having become surplus to the Admiralty's needs, had been provided to the Dominion of Newfoundland by the Royal Navy in 1902 for training purposes. After some debate it was eventually decided that she would be permanently moored in the harbour of the capital, her superstructure reduced, and a wooden shelter built on her upper deck to provide training facilities and living quarters for the prospective naval recruits.



(Right above: HMS 'Calypso' in full sail. She was to be re-named 'Briton' in 1916 when a new 'Calypso', a modern cruiser, was about to be launched by the Royal Navy. – This photograph, taken of her by the Royal Navy in 1898, is by courtesy of Admiralty House Museum)

Fourteen days after having first reported to Calypso in St. John's, on February 4 Seaman Miller was apparently promoted from the rank of *Seaman Recruit* to that of *Seaman; it would then appear that on the same February 4 of that 1915, he was to depart from St. John's to cross the Atlantic – this suggested by the dates documented in his sparse service file.**

On that date, the detachment of volunteers for the Army that upon its arrival at Edinburgh Castle was to become 'C' Company of the Newfoundland contingent in the United Kingdom, boarded the tender *Neptune* in St. John's Harbour for the short journey down the coast to Bay Bulls. There the ocean-going vessel *Dominion* awaited to carry it across the Atlantic and it might be assumed that the Naval Reservists were to be a part of that contingent.



(Right above: The photograph of personnel of 'C' Company on board the 'Neptune' on the way to the harbour at Bay Bulls is from the Provincial Archives.)

****It appears that in many cases, even if the recruit in question had not already previously been with the Royal Naval Reserve, the required twenty-eight day training period, all or partially, was waived by 'Royal Proclamation'.***

The available sources do not, however, record any Newfoundland naval reservists taking passage on *Dominion*. In fact, *Calypso's* drill register of the time records that the personnel were to leave St. John's on board the *Allan Line* vessel, the SS *Mongolian*, on February 17 – although the ship's captain records (see below) that it was the 18th.

The situation seems to have been a bit more complicated than that: Days before, according to the local newspapers, on that February 4-5, *Mongolian* had left St. John's to attempt to force a passage through the heavy ice surrounding the entrance to St. John's and extending well offshore. It was to no avail and after three days of futile effort the ship returned to port.

In re-entering St. John's Harbour, however, the vessel struck a rock and, after inspection, it was decided necessary to do emergency repairs in the local dock. In the meantime some of the vessel's passengers were to take the train across the island so as to catch another ship in Halifax.

On or about February 23, the repairs having been completed, *Mongolian* departed Newfoundland once again, only to be immediately met with heavy seas which eventually were to at least partially undo much of the temporary work which had been completed to the ship only days before.

The following is an adaption of a letter written by *Mongolian's* captain after his ship had reached the safety of the harbour of Halifax on February 25. It was addressed to Lieutenant-Commander McDermott of HMS *Calypso* who saw fit to forward it to the Office of the Colonial Secretary – whence it made its way to the local press.

Dear Sir:-

It is but just that I submit the following to your notice.

As you are aware, the ship under my command left St. John's 18th February with 200 R.N.R. ratings from your ship under the command of Captain Alan Goodridge. On their arrival on board 'Mongolian' Captain Goodridge at once established regular discipline and routine.

Shortly after leaving port rough and foggy weather was encountered and as ship proceeded East this weather became worse each day. On 22nd and 23rd a heavy gale raged from North-East with very high seas, causing the ship to labour considerably. On the latter date trouble arose through the giving-out of temporary repairs done in St. John's. Considerable water was found making its way into the fore end of the ship. After consultation I decided to return here to Halifax.

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I requested Captain Goodridge with ratings under his command to assist me in every way consistent with requirements. It is needless to say such help was given in the most energetic and cheerful manner by way of preparing for any emergency. Manning deck pumps (which were kept going day and night until arrival into port). Also a number of men were detailed to assist in the engine room and stokehold. (Chief Engineer Brown of this ship desires me to specially mention the valuable assistance of these men.

For my part I cannot speak too highly of Captain Goodridge. His cheerful and composed manner throughout went far to inspire confidence not only in the men under his command but also the passengers entrusted to my care.

I would request, Sir, that you would be good enough to forward to His Excellency the Governor my appreciation for the assistance so ably rendered by him. I would also ask you to place on record my high opinion of Petty Officer George Gill and Armourer Luxon.

The entire staff of my ship join with me in thanking the men of the Newfoundland Reserve whose conduct throughout was most exemplary and helpful in every way.

I may say that almost immediately upon arrival here the men were transferred to the SS 'Scandinavian' and sailed about 9 p.m..

J.W. Hatherly
Master S.S. Mongolian

(Right: The SS 'Mongolian' was an elderly vessel constructed in 1891. Built for the Allan Line Company she was to have served as a troopship during the Boer War before being bought by the British Admiralty, again for war service, in 1914 or 1915. She was not to survive the conflict: on July 21 of 1918 she was torpedoed and sunk by U-boat 70 with a loss of thirty-five lives. – The photograph of Mongolian is from the British Home Child Group International web-site.)



SS Mongolian

Once having disembarked from *Scandinavian* - on which they had journeyed from Halifax (see in letter above) - in the United Kingdom in early March, any Naval personnel would have been either posted directly to a ship or ordered to undergo further training at one of various Royal Navy establishments – these for the most part in England. In the case of Seaman Miller, the destination was to be *Pembroke I* at Chatham in the English county of Kent.

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Pembroke I was the base for regular seamen and also a holding-barracks for those awaiting a posting to one of His Majesty's ships, and it was therefore ***Pembroke I*** to which Seaman Miller was to be attached.

****There was also a series of ships named 'Pembroke', the last several of which were used as depot ships and for harbour service at Chatham. This is the 'HMS Pembroke' found on the cap-bands of the sailors who served there perhaps in their thousands - but who were never to set eyes on the actual ship in question.***

Naval discipline being distinct in some ways from the laws that governed other parties such as the Army and civilians, sailors had to be on the books of a serving naval vessel to be legally subject to naval law and order, even when these sailors were serving on land.

Thus the elderly and obsolescent vessels that plied the waters adjacent to the many naval land establishments – and known as stone frigates – were in theory the home ships of the tens, hundreds, thousands of men who laboured ashore.



Which is why Seaman Miller would have worn an HMS 'Pembroke' cap-band.

(Right above: Some buildings of the large Royal Navy complex which was the HMS 'Pembroke' naval establishment at Chatham for just over one hundred years. Today it has been transformed into a university campus. – photograph from 2010)

Seaman Miller was to serve almost eleven months...***on strength...at Pembroke I.*** However this is not to imply that all this time was spent ashore. As suggested above, Pembroke was also responsible for manning ships and at some point during that period – the date is not recorded in his files – he was attached to a ship.

The vessel was the ***Clan MacFarlane**** of the ***Clan Line***, a ship which, although apparently not an armed merchant-cruiser as reported in some sources – she does not appear in Royal Navy records – was armed and had navy personnel on board. In late December of that year she was ***en route*** from Glasgow and Liverpool with a general cargo to the Indian port of Bombay (today ***Mumbai***) when she was attacked some hundred kilometres to the south-east of the island of Crete.



****The Clan Line is probably better known to Newfoundland history as the owner of the Clan MacNaughton which sank on March 4 of 1915 in the North Atlantic, taking all of its crew – just fewer than three-hundred including twenty-three reservists – to their death.***

(Right above: The Clan Line vessel 'Clan MacFarlane' of just fewer than five-thousand tons was constructed in 1898, was the second of four ships to bear the name. – photograph from the bandstaffregister.com web-site)

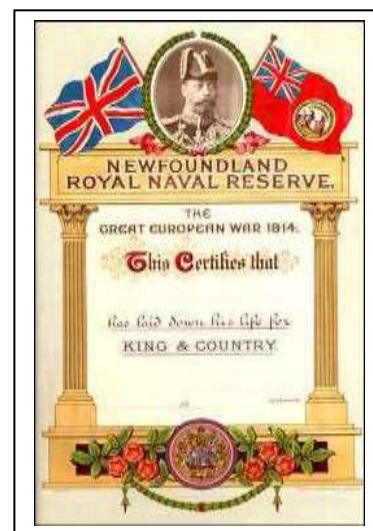
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The date of Seaman Miller's death is recorded as having been January 16 of 1916 with the cause of death documented simply as...*Lost in ship*. From the following adapted report it may be seen that the circumstances were a little more complicated than they may appear:

The 'Clan MacFarlane', bound from England to Bombay with a general cargo and with a crew of seventy-four, left Malta on the morning of December 28. Two days later in the afternoon she was torpedoed without warning. The submarine had not been seen but no sooner had the ship been struck than it appeared on the surface. The crew of the 'Clan MacFarlane', realising the ship was doomed, took to the boats which were approached by the submarine whose captain asked the details of the steamer. The 'Clan MacFarlane' not sinking very fast, the submarine put five shots below her waterline before making off and disappearing below the surface once more.

Six boats had been launched, containing all the crew, and were tied together in a line. Thus they remained together for three days in rough seas surviving on a half biscuit and half a dipper of water per day. On January 2, due to heavy seas, two boats broke away, drifted further apart and were never seen again. On January 4, Captain Swanson's boat, having already lost two men through exposure, also broke loose and drifted away. The three remaining, half-filled with water and their occupants suffering from exposure and starvation, drifted about for three more days and nights still tossed about by the rough seas. By this time eleven more crew members had died, with the others in a state of collapse.

(Right above: A Memorial Scroll, a copy of which was distributed to the families of those who had sacrificed their life while in the Newfoundland Royal Naval Reserve)



On January 7, however, they attracted the attention of a passing British steamer which picked them up and brought them to Malta. But, out of the crew of seventy-four only twenty-four have been landed and fifty are still unaccounted for. – adapted from the wrecksite.eu website

A further, later, report summarized: *Finally, just twenty-four crew members survived*.*

**Yet again, some accounts say the crew numbered seventy-five and that fifty-two were lost.*

The son of John Miller, fisherman and farmer, and of Jane Miller (née *Churchill*) of Portugal Cove, later of Miller Town, he was brother to Elizabeth, Edmund, Ambrose, Ananias and to Walter.



(Right above: *The sacrifice of Seaman Harold Miller is honoured on the War Memorial in the community of Portugal Cove. – photograph from 2011(?)*)

(Right: *The photograph of Seaman Harold Miller is from the Royal Canadian Legion publication 'Lest We Forget'.*)



Seaman Miller is recorded as having died at the *reported* age of nineteen years on December 30, 1915*, in various sources, but on January 19, 1916, in the St. John's Registry of Deaths. However, as seen further above, it may have been on neither of those dates: date of birth in Portugal Cove, Newfoundland, August 17, 1897 (from the Newfoundland Birth Register) and on August 17, 1896 from his own service record and enlistment papers.

**The date on which the vessel was last seen or reported afloat is often considered to be the official date of her loss – and thus also the loss of those on board – if no further information becomes available.*

*Seaman Miller served only in the Royal Navy and was not in the service of Canada as is cited in some sources, notably the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.**

Seaman Harold Miller was entitled to the 1914-1915 Star, as well as to the British War Medal (centre) and the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).



The above dossier has been researched, compiled and produced by Alistair Rice. Please email any suggested amendments or content revisions if desired to criceadam@yahoo.ca. Last updated – January 21, 2023.